

AESTHETICS AND PHILOSOPHY AS RELATED TO INDIAN MUSIC

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While listening to a Beethoven composition on a soft June night, Aldous Huxley suddenly became aware of a feeling of 'blessedness'. In that lively essay 'Music at Night', he further narrates the process through which the artist gets a glimpse of his ultimate vision: 'The substance of a work of art is inseparable from its form, its truth and its beauty are two, and yet mysteriously, one'. Here, in this particular statement of Huxley, philosophy, generally believed to be a study of the nature of truth, approaches aesthetics, whose ultimate aim is the perception of beauty in Nature and the arts. Supposed to be a specific study within the broad purview of philosophical speculations, aesthetics concerns itself primarily with perceptions.

Structurally, *raga* music of India is based on melody pattern which has an underlying system of its own; philosophically, it is the sum total expression of the Indian mind which has tried to attain a highly cultivated state of aesthetic experience through such melody pattern. The mythology and history behind the origin and development of Indian music have always been emphatic in associating it with spirituality, while the aesthetic impact on the listener is derived from the emotive responses that a performing musician might evoke with his unique interpretation of *svara* — note — patterns within the framework of a particular *raga*. In a subtle way, aesthetics thus approaches the more valid foundation of philosophy, though in a mysterious way, as suggested by Huxley. And, wherein lies that mystery?

Let us have, by way of recapitulation, the etymological significance of the two terms to be related shortly to music. The word 'aesthetic' is derived from the Greek word 'aesthetics' meaning one who perceives. Perception is a faculty of referring of sensations to their external causes. True appreciation of beauty depends on the perceptibility of an individual who should be compassionate — *sahrdaya* — and to whom artistic communication is anything but obligatory. And what should be his field of perception in the present context? The beauty in Nature and the beauty derived from art, — rather music, which embodies sound as its principal constituent. Beauty is

something which cannot be conceived; on the contrary, it is related mostly to sense perceptions. The word 'philosophy' again, as we know, is derived from two Greek words 'philos' and 'sophos' meaning love of wisdom. The significance has been extended further and the word came to be related to the human enquiry into the nature of knowledge and the nature of ultimate reality. The Indian equivalent of the word is however *darsan* which seems to be affirmative in its significance as something realised.

In his famous treatise on Aesthetics, Croce defines the two pure forms of knowledge as 'aesthetic and intellectual or conceptual' not exactly as opposites, but surely different in so far as artistic creativity is concerned. So, perception, which is related to all artistic pursuits and conception that leads to the knowledge of science and philosophy, are obviously two separate methods. How can music therefore be related, at the same time, to these two varied aspects of the human faculty, that of perception and conception?

Here again Croce comes to our rescue. Let us quote him : 'The most lofty manifestations, the summits of intellectual and of intuitive knowledge shining from afar, are called, as we know, Art and Science. Art and Science, then, are different yet linked together: they meet on one side, which is the aesthetic side'. And lastly, Croce concludes his essay on 'Art and Philosophy' by saying 'Intuition gives us the world, the phenomenon; the concept gives us the noumenon, the spirit'. As phenomenon and noumenon are not opposed to each other fundamentally, we can have intuition and concepts as the two parallel aspects of human faculty. Intuition again, has been described by some philosophers as the immediate perception of truth and reality. Response to beauty in artistic activity depends therefore, on intuitive knowledge, but the appreciation of its formal and structural aspects are purely conceptual in nature.

Music, basically an aesthetic pursuit can, perhaps, against this background, approach philosophy in its pure form. Sir William Jones, the celebrated founder of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was also a pioneer in interpreting Indian music to his own countrymen. In his famous treatise published in the Asiatic Researches in 1799, Sir William raised the same problem. But his statements were categorical. He considered music both as a science and as an art, both as a philosophy and as an aesthetic pursuit. His observations are as follows,

'Music belongs, as a science, to an interesting part of natural philosophy, which by mathematical deductions from constant phenomenon, explains the causes and properties of sound, limits the number of mixed, or harmonic, sounds to a certain series, which perpetually recurs, and fixes the ratio, which they bear to each other but considered as an art, it combines the sounds, which philosophy distinguishes in such a manner as to gratify our ears, or affect our imagination, or by uniting both objects, to captivate the fancy while it pleases the sense, and speaking as it were the language of beautiful nature, to raise correspondent ideas and emotions in the mind of the hearer; it then and then only becomes what we call a fine art, allied very nearly to verse, painting, and rhetoric.'

Sir William has obviously referred to the relation of *vedi* and *samvedi svaras* which are at a constant distance of 8 or 12 *srutis* apart. Moreover, in the *sruti* relation of the *svaras*, if considered as in an octave in the *sadja grama*, a perfect mathematical and harmonic relationship may be found.

However, aesthetics and philosophy are then related to music at least in a complementary if not identical manner. An objective definition of music is necessary at this moment. *Sangita*, the Sanskrit equivalent for music, has been defined by Moirer Williams, in his (lexicon as 1) that which is sung in chorus or harmony, and (2) the art or science of singing with music and dancing. In *Gita*, the root verb expresses the functions of both *gana* and *Kathana*. It would not be out of place to mention here that *samagana* was meant both for recitation and singing. The traditional meaning of *sangita* is *taurjatrik* that employs the simultaneous performances of *nritta*, *gita* and *vadya*. But then comes the prefix *sama* which has a variety of synonyms as 'perfectly', 'artistically', 'fully' and so on. The significance of *sangita* is, therefore, rich and varied even when considered from the sociological and religious background.

In order to trace out the origin of our *sangita*, the musicologists have firstly enquired of the *nada*, the root cause of all this manifest world. Philosophy gets its hold on music right then. It is surely an interesting study where Sarngadeva has devoted more than two hundred *slokas* in the *svara-gata adhyaya* of his famous treatise *Sangitaratnakara* only to study the origin of our music and of the *nada*. With the precise knowledge of a physiologist, he has given detailed anatomy of the human body that produces the *nada*, remembering though that the Lord Sankara Himself is the *nada-tana* — embodiment of the all-pervasive *nada*. Matanga, in his treatise *Brhaddasi*, has pointed out that neither the development of *svara* nor the existence of music is possible without the *nada*; he has, moreover, emphasized that *nada* is *parasakti* and *Mahesvara* itself:

na nadana bine gitem ne nedane bine swereh
and again,
nederupe pere sektirnederupoh mehasvereh

Since Matanga, all the leading musicologists of India have made pointed reference to this *nada*, associating it with the ultimate Creator. *Nada* is the immediate cause of *sabda* or *dhvani*. It exists in space as *anahata*. This space i.e. *akasa*, is the container of the *nada*, according to our ancient philosophers, specially, *vaishesikas*.

The concept of *chhande* again is intimately connected with the *tandava* of Nataraja which has been summed up by Havel as the threefold processes of creation, preservation and destruction. As *sabda* or *dhvani* is derived from *nada*, which is contained in infinite space, so *chhande* is derived from infinite time. The basic constituents of music, *svara* and *chhanda*, are thus related to Space and Time, which are both infinite. The conceptual aspect of music is thus related to the broad philosophic attitude of the Indian mind that has ever tried to discover the inner significance in all our unlimited human pursuits. It is further known that the *atmana* or the divine psyche, is the foundation of all music.

A study of aesthetics, as related to Indian music, presupposes a study of the *alankara* that are used in music and other arts. Bharata has extensively dealt both with the *alankara* as well as with the corresponding *rasas* derived from the application of those *alankara*. The history and development of poetry and the finer arts suggests that the *alankariks* have differed from time to time in their method of estimation of creative art, but have

agreed on the fundamental issue in assigning a common significance to the evaluation of the aspect of creativity, related, as such, to enjoyment.

It might seem at the beginning that the various *alankariks* have stressed the aspects of either *alankaras*, or *riti*, or *dhavani* or *rasa* as the single determinant factor in evaluating the beauty of that artistic piece. But Jagannath, the last of the great aestheticians, added a common significance for judging the specific merit of poetry and the arts. He ascribed, to the greatness of a poetic piece, the quality of its being *ramaniya* to the reader,

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His analysis has found an echo also in the judgement of musical aesthetics. We have known that *raga* or the melody pattern is that which gives enjoyment to the listener. This quality of *ranjana* is almost identical with the quality of its being *ramaniya*. The aspect of *vyanjana* — a process of suggestion, and the *bhavas* — the emotional attributes, are basically related to this aspect of *ranjana*. In the 29th Chapter of *Natyasastra*, Bharata has extensively dealt with the *rasas* and its relation to various forms of the *natyagiti*. Evocation of *rasa* and that of *vyanjana* is but a step leading to the aspect of *ranjana*. The aesthetic motive that relates itself to the enjoyment of music is noticeable at this stage. Dr. S. K. De, in his Tagore Centenary lectures at the University of Chicago, pointed out during his discourse on the 'Sanskrit poetics as a study of aesthetics' that the theory of *rasa* forms one of the most important aesthetic foundations of Sanskrit. Developing his propositions he observed, "All theorists agree that *rasa*, which cannot be manifested without an accompanying state of joy, conveys a peculiar *ramaniyata* essential to poetry".

The final aspect to be considered in this connection relates basically to the processes that lead to this *ranjana*, to be cherished or felt by the listener. *Ragas* are but various structural patterns of *svaras* with certain distinct individual characters of their own and are formed with the sole object of being *ramaniya* or *monoranjak* — pleasing — to the listener. It is again through the various broad forms of Indian music that the *ragas* express themselves. A perfect integration of these two simultaneous processes — one of the structural progression of the *ragas*, the other, of the presentation and development of forms according to the sentiments expressed through the *ragas* — leads us towards the inherent spirit of *raga* music.

The aesthetic appreciation of Indian music, depends on several factors, the most important being its association with the sentiments that are evoked in each particular melody pattern. Let us therefore conclude by saying that philosophy is related to Indian music in so far as its outline, as described by C.E.M. Joad, concerns not with acts but with values; on the other hand, the study of aesthetics cannot be separated from an appreciation of music, as this particular branch of fine arts is something primarily to be perceived in the context of the sentiments derived from such music patterns.

Thus the expression of sentiments forms an important approach to the study of aesthetics in relation to Indian music; but it should be borne in mind, what Huxley felt — that the feeling of blessedness is the kind of enjoyment on the part of a listener of *raga* music — and this particular state

of mind is surely a substitute for the *santa rasa* — feeling of tranquility — as described in our *Vaisnava* poetry. In focusing the need for an aesthetic approach to the branches of arts nobody has emphasized it as Rabindranath, who observed:

“The *sastra* that I have always referred to is neither musicology nor poetics, it is rather a study of the finer art which encompasses both music and poetry within its sphere”!

Tagore obviously meant here a broader study of aesthetics for an appreciation of both music and poetry.

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